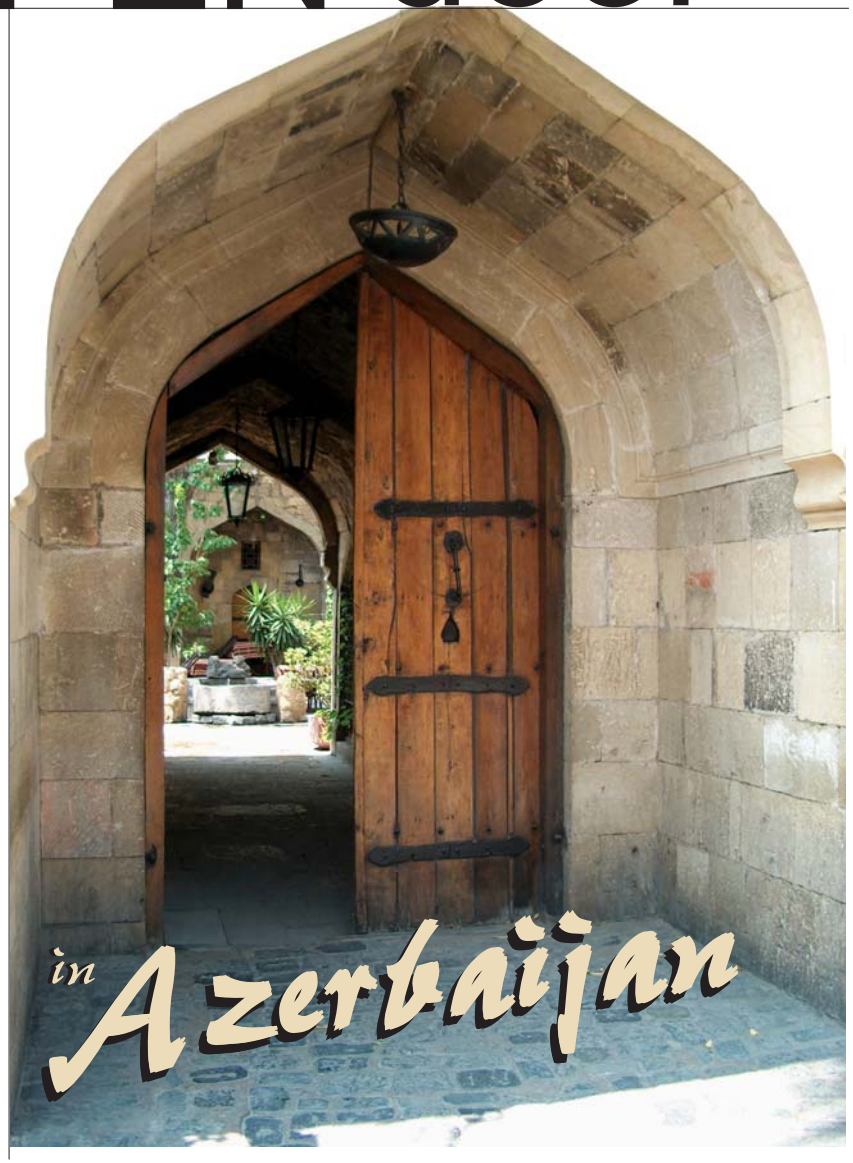
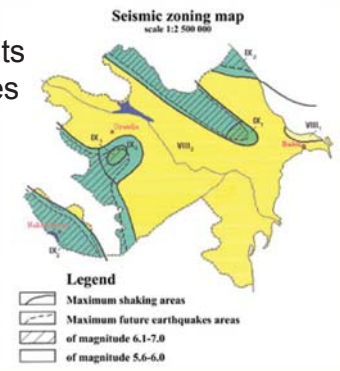
OPEN door

Partnership in Azerbaijan



In November 2000, an earthquake rocked Azerbaijan's capital Baku, sending residents fleeing from buildings in panic. Ambulances rushed to the scene, and more than 20 lives were lost. Millions of dollars in damage were left in the wake of the 6.3 magnitude earthquake. GRANT SATTLER tells of the Corps' involvement helping coordinate future relief in earthquake-prone Transcausasia.



It can take critical hours to airlift European or American rescue and recovery teams thousands of miles to earthquake-prone Transcaucasia.

Saving lives by enabling faster response to natural disasters through cooperation in the region was the aim of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers participation in a recent Civil-Military Emergency Planning (CMEP) event in Baku, Azerbaijan. Held in July 2003, the four-day CMEP program workshop hosted by the Civil Defense Department of Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense brought together military and civil response agencies of the GUUAM nations. GUUAM is an acronym standing for the participant countries of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova.

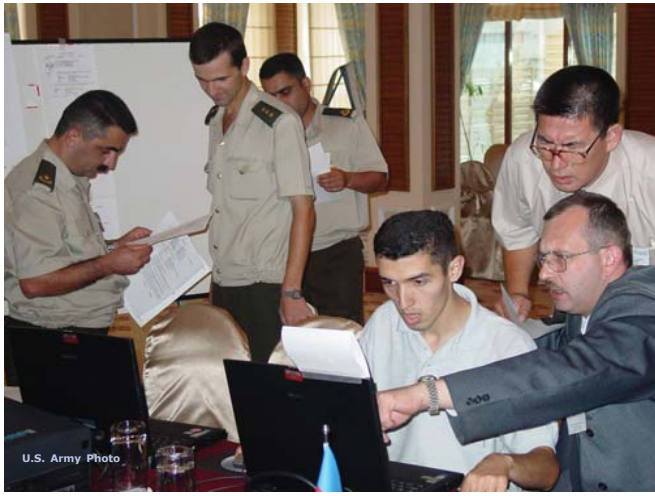
"Most of these nations have internal capability for handling a disaster within their borders," said David MacPherson from Europe District's International Engineering Center. Typically, he explained, these countries have first responded to natural disasters with local forces, calling in national resources if the situation is beyond the capability of local emergency operations. If the problem is too big, however, they have turned to the international community rather than their neighbors.

"CMEP is promoting that they work with their neighbors — nations they have developed relations with — to request assistance and handle emergencies [collectively] without western Europe or the U.S.," MacPherson said. "With a regional response, they can respond much more quickly."

The CMEP program provides services to Emergency Management and Defense Agencies in nations working together to develop cooperative, trans-border agreements and plans for mutual support during catastrophic disasters, said Annabeth Lee, from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Southwestern Division headquartered in Dallas. While its focus is civil-military disaster response, the ultimate CMEP goal is to have all of the U.S. European Command Partnership for Peace (PfP) countries cooperating. MacPherson said, "They will be working together even more as they eventually join NATO."

Lee said she and other participants from Southwestern Division, Europe District, and the Engineer

Members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers joined civilian and military teams from Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Turkey, and Bulgaria in a Civil-Military Emergency Planning event in Baku, Azerbaijan in July. The CEMP promotes joint emergency response from neighboring nations.



U.S. Army Photo

Members of the Azerbaijan military post technical seismic and emergency data during a joint exercise in Baku, Azerbaijan in July. Teams from Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Turkey and Bulgaria joined in this Civil-Military Emergency planning.

Research Development Center (ERDC) in Hanover, New Hampshire, were proud to be involved in a program supporting Corps of Engineers professional capabilities in worldwide emergency management development.

As the USACE Emergency Operations Representative to the GUUAM, Southwestern Division's Royce Swayne attended the main planning conference and the workshop. Doug Sommer, Europe District's Chief, International Engineering Center, was the senior Corps representative for the workshop.

Additionally, Maj. Joel Potts represented the Oklahoma Army National Guard, Azerbaijan's Partner State in EUCOM's PfP program, in developing the exercise scenario and standard operating procedures used for communication between the GUUAM nations.

"The Standard Operating Procedures developed messages in a specified format so when one nation requests assistance from another, they are familiar with the format and can respond with a message offering resources, answered by an acceptance message," MacPherson said.

Although not part of GUUAM, representatives from Turkey and Bulgaria attended as observers and facilitators. "It was the first time that Turkey has participated," MacPherson said of the NATO member state. "It was a big step because it shows they have a desire to work with other nations outside of southeast Europe."

"The representatives were brilliant, and we all learned from each other."

The workshop familiarized participants with use of the Partnerships for Peace Information System, or PIMS.

"The workshop improved communication with PIMS, which is computer based with internet connectivity, so that they can communicate from one nation to another during an emergency," MacPherson said. "Each country will have PIMS connectivity installed in their Emergency Operations Center." Three representatives of the PIMS led by Anne Bentley ensured essential support.

Lee said she saw highly effective and enthusiastic working relationships developing for emergency planning among the GUUAM nations. She said national representatives expressed a strong interest in developing some more formal basis by agreement for lasting cooperation in emergency planning and response. MacPherson said "They are working on draft agreements, modeled after a Ukraine-Moldova agreement, which would cover all the GUUAM countries… ."

U.S. Army Photo

▲ **David MacPherson (left) with Doug Sommer.**

▶ **Earthquakes in the Transcaucasia region take lives and cause millions of dollars in damage. Members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Euope District joined with other Corps teams in Baku, Azerbaijan in July to help these nations plan for emergency operations.**

Lee, who facilitated a Geographic Information System (GIS) working group along with ERDC's Andy Bruzewicz, said that although technological competence varied, there is a strong interest by the GUUAM nations to cooperate in USACE-led-GIS and database applications for civil-military emergency planning.

When Lee first heard about the Baku workshop she said, "My first reaction … was that I should not go anywhere that I cannot spell." But she was soon involved in the multi-national cooperative project and exchanged information on the use of GIS in emergency operations. "It was challenging to discuss GIS in Russian with English software," she said of the effort supported by interpreters. "The representatives were brilliant, and we all learned from each other. GIS sessions took twice as long because of the interpretation. Many of the technical terms were difficult to translate because there are not comparable words in Russian." Most workshop participants spoke Russian, although the Russian language has not been taught in Azeri schools for the last dozen years.

ERDC's Remote Sensing/GIS Center has been providing GIS support to the CMEP program since 1999 and has developed a multinational database that is serviced from a server at the Corps' Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory in Hanover, N.H., Bruzewicz said.

The GIS data has been increased through each of the CMEP workshops, he explained, making these data available for use by each country as part of disaster-related activities.

The July workshop also provided a forum to demonstrate to Azeri regional leadership and news media the value of the computer-based multi-national emergency planning in response to a simulated earthquake in the Caspian Sea. Baku is located on the western shore of the Caspian Sea (the world's largest inland body of water) and is the largest city in Azerbaijan.

U.S. Army Photo

Practical exercises, such as this one in Uzbekistan, are essential for training.